

Next Generation Science Standards

Most states have science standards that represent some variation on the [Next Generation Science Standards \(NGSS\)](#) or are heavily influenced by them. Unfortunately, the NGSS biology standards on evolution are quite one-sided. But the NGSS also include overarching science and engineering practices. A teacher may incorporate skills from the science and engineering practices to help students use scientific inquiry in their examination of evolutionary theory. Standards are a floor, not a ceiling, and teachers may complete the standard and curriculum requirements and then teach more about evolution.

High School

See below for the high school standards.

Students who demonstrate understanding can:

HS-LS4-1. Communicate scientific information that common ancestry and biological evolution are supported by multiple lines of empirical evidence. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on a conceptual understanding of the role each line of evidence has relating to common ancestry and biological evolution. Examples of evidence could include similarities in DNA sequences, anatomical structures, and order of appearance of structures in embryological development.]*

HS-LS4-2. Construct an explanation based on evidence that the process of evolution primarily results from four factors: (1) the potential for a species to increase in number, (2) the heritable genetic variation of individuals in a species due to mutation and sexual reproduction, (3) competition for limited resources, and (4) the proliferation of those organisms that are better able to survive and reproduce in the environment. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on using evidence to explain the influence each of the four factors has on number of organisms, behaviors, morphology, or physiology in terms of ability to compete for limited resources and subsequent survival of individuals and adaptation of species. Examples of evidence could include mathematical models such as simple distribution graphs and proportional reasoning.]*

HS-LS4-3. Apply concepts of statistics and probability to support explanations that organisms with an advantageous heritable trait tend to increase in proportion to organisms lacking this trait. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on analyzing shifts in numerical distribution of traits and using these shifts as evidence to support explanations.] [Assessment Boundary: Assessment is limited to basic statistical and graphical analysis. Assessment does not include allele frequency calculations.]*

HS-LS4-4. Construct an explanation based on evidence for how natural selection leads to adaptation of populations. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on using data to provide evidence for how specific biotic and abiotic differences in ecosystems (such as ranges of seasonal temperature, long-term climate change, acidity, light, geographic barriers, or evolution of other organisms) contribute to a change in gene frequency over time, leading to adaptation of populations.]*

HS-LS4-5. Evaluate the evidence supporting claims that changes in environmental conditions may result in (1) increases in the number of individuals of some species, (2) the emergence of new species over time, and (3) the extinction of other species. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on determining cause and effect relationships for how changes to the environment such as deforestation, fishing, application of fertilizers, drought, flood, and the rate of change of the environment affect distribution or disappearance of traits in species.]*

HS-LS4-6. Create or revise a simulation to test a solution to mitigate adverse impacts of human activity on biodiversity.* *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on testing solutions for a proposed problem related to threatened or endangered species, or to genetic variation of organisms for multiple species.]*

As you can see, none of these standards asks students to evaluate the evidence for evolution. Rather, students are asked to support evolution, especially in standard HS-LS4-1.

The Next Generation Science Standards are composed of several parts: in addition to the written standards, there are disciplinary core ideas, cross-disciplinary concepts, and science and engineering practices.

Standards, again, are a floor and not a ceiling. Teachers may present the scientific evidence for and against evolution as long as they make sure they cover the required material first. The more that biology teachers can integrate science and engineering practices into their instruction, the better for students.

Two of the practices most relevant to instruction on evolution are “Engaging in Argument from Evidence” and “Asking Questions and Defining Problems.” Students should learn to think like scientists, analyzing evolutionary theory, rather than being spoon-fed dogma.

Science and Engineering Practices

Engaging in Argument from Evidence: Argumentation is the process by which explanations and solutions are reached.

High school: Engaging in argument from evidence in 9–12 builds on K–8 experiences and progresses to using appropriate and sufficient evidence and scientific reasoning to defend and critique claims and explanations about the natural and designed world(s). Arguments may also come from current scientific or historical episodes in science.

- Compare and evaluate competing arguments or design solutions in light of currently accepted explanations, new evidence, limitations (e.g., trade-offs), constraints, and ethical issues.
- Evaluate the claims, evidence, and/or reasoning behind currently accepted explanations or solutions to determine the merits of arguments.
- Respectfully provide and/or receive critiques on scientific arguments by probing reasoning and evidence and challenging ideas and conclusions, responding thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, and determining what additional information is required to resolve contradictions.
- Construct, use, and/or present an oral and written argument or counter-arguments based on data and evidence.
- Make and defend a claim based on evidence about the natural world or the effectiveness of a design solution that reflects scientific knowledge, and student-generated evidence.

- Evaluate competing design solutions to a real-world problem based on scientific ideas and principles, empirical evidence, and logical arguments regarding relevant factors (e.g. economic, societal, environmental, ethical considerations).

Asking Questions and Defining Problems: A practice of science is to ask and refine questions that lead to descriptions and explanations of how the natural and designed world works and which can be empirically tested.

High School: Asking questions and defining problems in 9–12 builds on grades K–8 experiences and progresses to formulating, refining, and evaluating empirically testable questions and design problems using models and simulations.

- Ask questions that arise from careful observation of phenomena, or unexpected results, to clarify and/or seek additional information.
- Ask questions that arise from examining models or a theory, to clarify and/or seek additional information and relationships.
- Ask questions to determine relationships, including quantitative relationships, between independent and dependent variables.
- Ask questions to clarify and refine a model, an explanation, or an engineering problem.
- Evaluate a question to determine if it is testable and relevant.
- Ask questions that can be investigated within the scope of the school laboratory, research facilities, or field (e.g., outdoor environment) with available resources and, when appropriate, frame a hypothesis based on a model or theory.
- Ask and/or evaluate questions that challenge the premise(s) of an argument, the interpretation of a data set, or the suitability of the design.
- Define a design problem that involves the development of a process or system with interacting components and criteria and constraints that may include social, technical and/or environmental considerations.

Middle School

The NGSS also bring in evolution in middle school life science:

MS-LS4-2. Apply scientific ideas to construct an explanation for the anatomical similarities and differences among modern organisms and between modern and fossil organisms to infer evolutionary relationships. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on explanations of the evolutionary relationships among organisms in terms of similarity or differences of the gross appearance of anatomical structures.]*

MS-LS4-3. Analyze displays of pictorial data to compare patterns of similarities in the embryological development across multiple species to identify relationships not evident in the fully formed anatomy. *[Clarification Statement: Emphasis is on inferring general patterns of relatedness among embryos of different organisms by comparing the macroscopic appearance of diagrams or pictures.]*

Middle school students can practice scientific inquiry skills while learning about evolution but they should not be expected to analyze in as great a depth as high school students.

Engaging in Argument from Evidence

Engaging in argument from evidence in 6–8 builds on K–5 experiences and progresses to constructing a convincing argument that supports or refutes claims for either explanations or solutions about the natural and designed world(s).

- Compare and critique two arguments on the same topic and analyze whether they emphasize similar or different evidence and/or interpretations of facts.
- Respectfully provide and receive critiques about one’s explanations, procedures, models and questions by citing relevant evidence and posing and responding to questions that elicit pertinent elaboration and detail.
- Construct, use, and/or present an oral and written argument supported by empirical evidence and scientific reasoning to support or refute an explanation or a model for a phenomenon or a solution to a problem.
- Make an oral or written argument that supports or refutes the advertised performance of a device, process, or system, based on empirical evidence concerning whether or not the technology meets relevant criteria and constraints.
- Evaluate competing design solutions based on jointly developed and agreed-upon design criteria.

Asking Questions and Defining Problems

Asking questions and defining problems in grades 6–8 builds from grades K–5 experiences and progresses to specifying relationships between variables and clarifying arguments and models.

- Ask questions that require sufficient and appropriate empirical evidence to answer.
- Ask questions that arise from careful observation of phenomena, models, or unexpected results, to clarify and/or seek additional information.
- Ask questions to identify and/or clarify evidence and/or the premise(s) of an argument.
- Ask questions to determine relationships between independent and dependent variables and relationships in models.
- Ask questions to clarify and/or refine a model, an explanation, or an engineering problem.

- Ask questions that can be investigated within the scope of the classroom, outdoor environment, and museums and other public facilities with available resources and, when appropriate, frame a hypothesis based on observations and scientific principles.
- Define a design problem that can be solved through the development of an object, tool, process or system and includes multiple criteria and constraints, including scientific knowledge that may limit possible solutions.
- Ask questions that challenge the premise(s) of an argument or the interpretation of a data set.